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# STANFIELD HALL.

By J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



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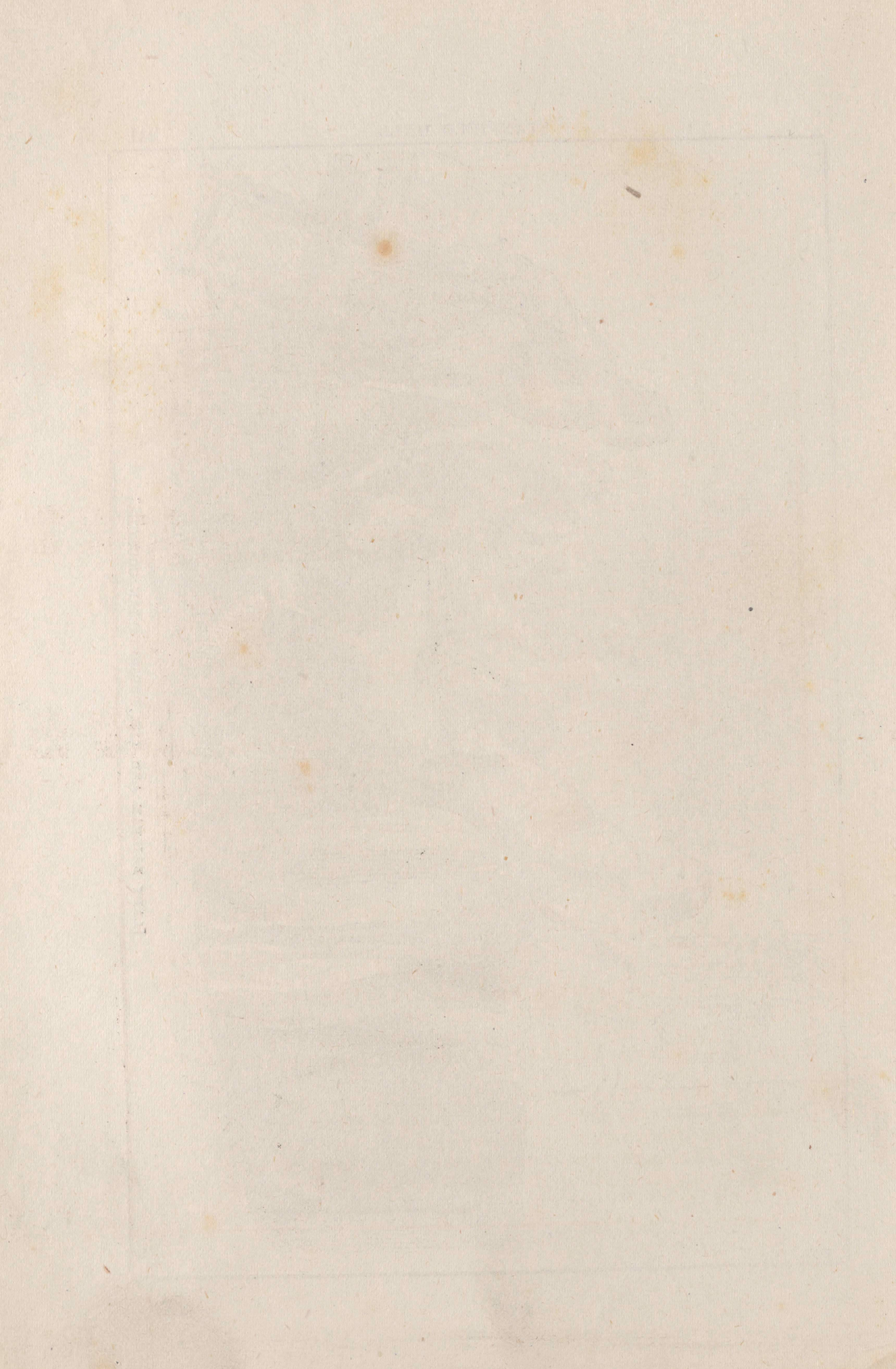
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[LADY FAIRFAX AND THE PRESBYTERIAN COUNCIL.]



protested against the whole proceedings, and that their protest has been received with scorn and contumely?"

"I have heard as much."

"That the king was brutally denied a hearing?" she added.

"He refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the court."

"Do you acknowledge it?" she demanded; "a court from which every Royalist and Presbyterian was carefully excluded; a court whose power, if once acknowledged equal to judge a king, will make short work with the holy Covenant, and all who have shed their blood to support it:—a court," she added, "which commanded its ruffian satellites to fire upon the wife of their general, because she expressed her abhorrence of their thirst for blood and abuse of the people's name."

The change which took place in the countenance of Fairfax on hearing the danger which had threatened the person of his wife was terrific. Its sleepy indifference vanished in a moment, and it assumed an almost savage energy as he folded her passionately to his heart.

"What!" he exclaimed, "thy life! Would they threaten thee? Thank Heaven, the hour of action has not passed. Singleton," he added, turning to the adjutant-general, "give orders to break up the cantonments. At five in the morning we march to London."

"To London!" faltered Newlight, whose pride was hurt at the general's peremptory manner; "we have not yet sufficiently debated—consulted the Lord——"

"The council is at an end, gentlemen," said Fairfax, whose resolution was sustained by the spirit of his wife, and indignation at the danger to which she had been exposed; for, as we before stated, he loved her passionately. "You have now only orders to receive, not advice to give. We have been fooled, gentlemen, too long. It is time the voice of the Presbyterians of England and Scotland were heard in the council of the nation. Farewell. We march at daybreak."

"Yet let us consider, gentlemen," said the dissatisfied Newlight, "the step we are——"

"Silence!" exclaimed the general, sternly; "no voice must now be heard but mine. It is thine," he added, "to pray for the battle, father; mine to direct it. Our weapons are different; let them not cross each other. The Word would fall harmless against steel."

"It hath crushed the proud and strong ere now," said the preacher, bitterly, as he strode from the apartment, "and may again."

So well was Fairfax beloved by his officers, that not a second remonstrance was offered; indeed, the majority of them, galled by the high tone which the Independents had lately assumed, would have preferred the restoration of the king, almost without conditions, to the triumph of the obnoxious party. The orders of the

general were obeyed, therefore, with alacrity. In a few minutes the chamber of council was deserted, and the leader of the Presbyterians left alone with his noble, high-minded wife.

Scarcely had they gone, than the soldier who had disputed her entrance cautiously deposited his musket against the panel of the door, and applied his ear to the keyhole to listen to their conversation. From the excitement of their meeting, and the scene which had just passed, they spoke in so loud a tone that he overheard every word.

"So!" he muttered, "good! good! I have learnt enough to make my peace with Cromwell, perhaps to incline him to my vengeance. The Presbyterians march on London in order to save the king. If I can reach it before them, they may find their progress stayed."

"You will return with me," he overheard Fairfax say to his wife; "I cannot bear you from my presence after what has passed."

"Impossible," said the lady; "I return to-night."

"But why?"

"I have a duty to perform, and you know I never compromise with principles."

"What is it?" demanded the husband.

"You shall know that hereafter. Trust me, it were better kept from thy knowledge now."

"Another mystery," thought the soldier, as his ears greedily sought the conversation; "but if human cunning can ferret it out, I will."

Yielding to the earnest entreaties of his wife, the general reluctantly permitted her to depart; but insisted upon sending an escort part of the way, in order to insure her safety from the numerous predatory bands of broken Royalists which infested the country. The soldier who had overheard their projects was, in fact, no other than Barford, who, on recovering from the wound which Martin inflicted on him in defence of his young mistress, had engaged as a simple volunteer, in order to conceal himself from the pursuit of the exasperated Royalists, the escape of the king having been prevented entirely through his means. As he was one of the escort appointed to accompany Lady Fairfax and her companion on their return to London, he resolved to seize the opportunity of making his peace, if possible, with Cromwell, by informing him of the determination of the Presbyterian leader and army to oppose the execution of Charles.

"Have you succeeded, lady?" demanded the disguised Rupert, as they once more galloped along the dark and dreary road on their return.

"I have," said his companion. "With daybreak the army advances towards London."

"Then all may yet be well."

"Be cautious," observed Lady Fairfax. "See how yon trooper rides in advance of his fellows—it may be zeal, or treacherous design to overhear our conversation. Where great interests are at stake, great prudence must be used."

Barford, seeing by the motion of Rupert's head that he had turned to observe him, fell back into the ranks with his companions, and resolved not to risk a discovery by a similar act of imprudence during the rest of the journey.

Immediately after the sentence had been pronounced by Bradshaw upon the unfortunate Charles, Cromwell left the Hall, and hastened to his own private residence in Westminster. His usual quiet manner was changed for one of feverish, nervous excitement. The visionary sceptre which had so long eluded his grasp now seemed within his reach, and he trembled with eagerness as he prepared to seize it. He had not been many minutes in his study before his son-in-law, Ireton, presented himself.

"I would be alone," said Cromwell.

"You will be better with society," roughly answered the soldier, "even though it be but mine. This is not a moment for the mind to sit brooding upon morbid thoughts, hatching vipers to sting you; but for action. The people are in a state of great excitement at the condemnation of the king."

"Let them be so. Do they speak openly?"

"And threateningly," added Ireton.

"The less the danger," observed the shrewd leader of mankind. "The resolution that will keep is silent; weakness alone expends itself in empty rage. The mob will storm, and prate, and threaten, but strike not a blow to save him. The Stuart's doom is fixed."

"He bore himself nobly to the last."

"Proudly, and therefore would I that he should be treated with every indulgence due to his misfortune, every respect due to his former state. The necessity which exacts the sacrifice does not prevent all pity for the victim."

"Great effort will be made to save him," observed Ireton. "There is a rumour of a rising in the City."

"Pshaw! it is not from that quarter danger threatens. The lazy citizens may prate, but they love their money-bags too well, and their dear safety, to risk either in defence of Charles. It is not them I fear."

"Who, then?"

"The gloomy, discontented Fairfax—the man who coquets with power as if he loved it not, e'en when he sighs to clasp it. His wife, who rules him as such minds are ruled—through his weakness—is at heart a Royalist."

"She must be watched," said Ireton.

"*She is watched*," replied Cromwell. "Dost think me such a dullard as to leave the faith of mine enemies to chance? No; I

have a means to read the hearts alike of friends or foes. There is not one about whose person I have not set sure guard."

"I care not," said the soldier, bluntly, "what guard you set on me. At the worst, I may blunder, but I have nothing to conceal. Only, father-in-law of mine, let your spies take heed; for if I catch one of the eavesdropping crew near me, I'll send him back to his employer minus both tongue and ears."

"Pshaw! It is not such as thee that I suspect."

"Now, then, to business. When the signing of the death-warrant?"

"To-morrow."

"And when the execution?"

"Three days afterwards."

"Should the tyrant resist?" observed Ireton.

"I have bethought me, too, of that," said Cromwell, and his countenance turned suddenly pale as he spoke. "All shall be prepared. Get me two iron rings fixed in the planking of the scaffold, nearest the block, and order fitting tackle. Should he refuse to bow his haughty head to the people's justice, it shall be dragged down like a steer's at the shambles."

His son-in-law gazed upon the speaker for a few moments in mute surprise; there was something so terrible in the cold precision and horrible calculation of the arrangement, that even his coarse nature was startled.

"By my soul, father-in-law, I believe that if the executioner were missing, you would find nerve enough to strike the blow yourself."

"Was it imputed to Judith as a crime, that to deliver Israel she struck off the head of the tyrant Holofernes?" demanded Cromwell, in a gloomy tone; for the possibility of not finding an executioner had frequently struck him.

"Not that I am aware of; but there is this difference in the case, Judith struck not the blow to take his vacant place."

"Thinkst thou," said the Puritan, who at times descended to play the hypocrite even with himself, "that any unworthy motive hath influenced my heart in this?"

"Tush! tush!" interrupted Ireton; "we at least ought to understand each other, for our interests are one. Without being as quick-sighted as a hawk, I can read as I run. Charles once dead, you take his vacant place."

"I!" repeated Cromwell, with an imperceptible smile.

"Who else? The seat must be filled. As for this Republic, Commonwealth, or what else the dreamers choose to term it, none but fools believe in it. Society is shaken to its foundation—it will require an iron hand to steady it. Like shipwrecked mariners at sea when the gallant ship hath struck, all men's eyes are fixed upon the only point of land in view. You are that point."

"I am," said his father-in-law, "what Heaven and accident have made me."

Their further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the celebrated Independent preacher, Hugh Peters, who had been appointed by Parliament to attend the king. Although a staunch Republican, the mild deportment of the royal captive had so won upon him, that he not only forgave him his refusal to listen to his ministry, but even promised to use his influence to allow him to be attended by Bishop Juxon, and receive from his hands the last consolations of religion.

As Peters not only possessed great energy of character, but vast influence with the Independents, both Cromwell and Ireton received him with great respect.

"How fares the doomed one?" demanded the former. "Hath he availed himself of the grace of thy ministry to reconcile his soul with God? Doth he feel the weight of his past transgressions?"

"Charles Stuart will die," said the preacher, "as he hath lived—firm in the errors of prelacy, faithful to the persecuting Church, drunk with the blood of saints."

"The fool!" said Ireton.

"At least he is sincere," replied the preacher. "He declined my ministry, but without insult or reproach. As for his conscience, it is either seared or peaceful. I cannot make him out, much less presume to judge him."

"Why, father," said Cromwell, eying the speaker, "the king, it seems, hath half-converted thee. To some minds there is a spell in royalty; it blinds all who approach within its rays."

"The royalty I bow to, at least, is not of earth," replied Hugh. "But enough of this. I am the bearer of a captive's prayer. May I speak?"

"Speak on."

"Charles Stuart demands the consolation of his Church in his last moments. He requires that Bishop Juxon should be permitted to attend him."

"And dost thou sanction this yearning after prelacy?" demanded Cromwell, eying the speaker curiously, as though he would read his very thoughts.

"The best of us are weak and erring. Search thine own heart," said Peters, "and there perchance thou wilt find a reply. Have thine own purposes been ever pure and immutable? Hast thou never, in the dark moments of thy soul, doubted of thyself?"

Both Cromwell and Ireton were astonished at the change which had come over the stern spirit of Hugh Peters, who, from a violent fanatic, animated with an intolerant persecuting spirit, had suddenly become indulgent to the creed he hated. The approach of death had invested Charles with a majesty more sacred in his eyes than

the royalty of birth, and he felt that it was not for clay to judge the salvation of its fellow dust.

"And dost thou demand this thing?" said Cromwell.

"Yea, pray for it," replied Peters, "as I would pray for one of my own faith were I at my hour of trespass. Man of the sword," he added, "there are moments when the veils fall from the eye of earth, and the soul, freed from its encumbrance, sees through the eye of reason. God will not judge of creeds from their abuse, but from the acts of those who have professed them."

"Thou wilt turn prelate soon," exclaimed Ireton, with a sneer.

"Sooner than thou wilt merciful, man of blood," added the preacher. "Is mercy, then, so strange to thee, that its words should frighten thee, e'en from the lips of the minister of God?"

"Your demand must be addressed to the judges, or the Parliament," observed Oliver. "Singly I can do nothing. I have but one voice in the decision."

"But that," urged Hugh, "is powerful. But it is the affectation of power sometimes to assume humility. Be generous to a fallen man; grant his request."

"Be it so," said Cromwell, signing a paper. "Seek out the prelate Juxon, since such is thy good pleasure, and let him do his ministry. If the concession trouble the tender conscience of the brethren, thy request touching this matter must be my justification."

"So I stand justified before God," replied Hugh, taking up the paper, "I care not for men's opinions. And now," he added, "I have another matter touching the prisoner."

"No more requests," exclaimed both Cromwell and Ireton.

"It shall be a demand, then," said the preacher, firmly.

"A demand!"

"Charles, as a monarch, has trampled upon the people's rights; as a man broken his faith; as king and man you have the right to punish him—but he is a father."

"Well?"

"Well!" repeated the minister; "know you not how sacred are the ties—how holy the claim that name implies? Man has no right to break such links asunder; he must see his children ere he dies."

"Impossible!" said Cromwell.

"He must," repeated Hugh, "or before the Parliament and the army will I denounce the tyranny of those who punish the parent in the man; who, masking ambition 'neath religion, violate the laws of nature and of God. All hearts are not like thine—of iron."

A hasty consultation followed between the two men of battle, both of whom feared the fiery eloquence of the preacher more than the swords of the Royalists; for his influence amongst the soldiers was unbounded, and, once offended, they knew that, like most

enthusiasts, he was capable of going any length to achieve his purpose.

"We have considered this," said the future Protector, after a pause, "and find that thou hast reason in this matter. I am a parent myself, and feel how sacred are the ties of nature. The children shall be sent to Zion House to take their last leave of their unhappy father. And now," he added, "let us not part in anger; let there be no bitterness between us. Men who are intrusted with worldly interests must often walk in worldly ways. Were the hearts of mankind pure and clear of offence and treachery, like thine, the task would be the easier."

"Such ways," observed the preacher coldly, as he left the apartment, "are not the ways of God. I will pray for thee, Oliver, for thou hast need of support—pray that in battling with thy passions the enemy of thy soul prevail not. Thou hast a high career before thee; oh, let it not be sullied at its close."

With these warning words the preacher departed. He was one of those men who sometimes see clearly, despite themselves; and he had long suspected that disinterested patriotism was not the only motive of Cromwell's actions; and he resolved to watch him closely.

"He must be looked to," observed Ireton.

"Needless," said his father-in-law. "Peters hath a heart too pure for treachery—too simple a mind for treason to plot in. Charles's firmness and resignation have struck him. He hath a tender conscience, and we'll not risk refusing him the ministry he asks. As for his request touching the children, he but forestalled my purpose; I had resolved on granting the parting interview he asked."

"And yet you hesitated?"

"Why, yes," continued Oliver. "Peters, like all good men, has his weak points. His spiritual pride was flattered in my yielding to his threat of appealing to Parliament and the army. He is one of those who would sooner rule men's minds than persons. There are in this dreaming world hundreds such."

That same night a private meeting was held at the speaker's house, between the leaders of the army and the judges of the king, to make final arrangements touching the execution.

There were at this time in London many concealed Royalists, braving imprisonment and death, in order, if possible, to rescue the king from his impending fate, the news of which excited in the breasts of all but his bitter enemies, the Independents, sentiments of disgust and terror. Few believed that Parliament would venture to such an extremity; but indulged in the vain hope that at the last some arrangement would be entered into which would save at once the nation from a crime and the life of the misguided victim. It was not in the houses of the nobility, or the haunts of

courtiers, that the still trusting Royalists were to be found. Experience had taught them caution, and their places of rendezvous were generally small hostels, far from the busy haunts of trade, kept by men devoted to the king, often of a birth which belied their seeming calling.

In a lone house, situated in the open fields between Westminster and Chelsea, about a dozen men were assembled drinking, to a casual observer. They would have been taken for travellers and mechanics, met to refresh themselves after the fatigues and journey of the day. The awkward manner in which the host served his guests showed that he had not long pursued his calling. A deep gloom was upon his countenance, and, indeed, seemed to have shadowed the features of all who were seated at the table.

"They will never dare proceed to execution," observed a grey-headed old man, whose seeming calling was that of a pedlar, for a small pack of hardware was lying on the floor beside him. "All England would rise against such an atrocity, and Europe would rise against it."

"All England is muzzled," replied a waggoner, in a bitter tone. "After suppressing the upper house, the traitors are prepared for any extremity, and Europe will treat with the murderers. France is governed by a priestly spirit; its king lost to the cry of honour and of chivalry. Spain is powerless. And what other Power would dare to interfere?"

There was a silence, for all knew that the speaker was in a position to judge better than any of them of the politics of the courts he named.

"We must trust to ourselves, or nothing——"

At this moment the door opened; and a stranger clad in the gabardine of a Jew, broken apparently with age, entered the apartment. In an instant the conversation changed to topics of trade and the state of the roads. Many impatient glances were cast from time to time at the intruder, who sat quietly sipping his ale at a short distance from the rest.

A thousand times in their hearts did the disguised Royalists curse the chance which conducted him to the spot.

"Come," said the host, his patience worn out at last, "it is time to close the house. I like not late hours; all who do not sleep here had better settle their scores and depart."

No one stirred. The speaker thought that the Jew would have taken the hint, but he retained his seat with the rest.

"Did you hear me, friend?" said the innkeeper.

"Yesh, yesh," replied the intruder, in a foreign accent; "but I intend to sleep here too. I have made much miles, and am tired."

"All my beds are full; there is another hostel three miles further."

"Another flagon of ale, then."

"I serve no more to-night."

"Oh, yes you will, Sir John."

No sooner had the speaker pronounced the title of the host, who was no other than Sir John Barlow, a devoted adherent of the king, than half a dozen swords were drawn, and pointed at his heart. In an instant the long beard and white hair of the pretended Israelite dropped, and discovered the pale, handsome countenance of Prince Rupert. He was recognised in an instant by the guests.

"Welcome, your highness!" said the waggoner, grasping him cordially by the hand; "this is indeed an unexpected meeting! We thought you safe in France!"

"Not while a hope remains, my lord, of saving my royal uncle."

"Pardon me," said the disguised peer; "but here I am Peter Rush, the waggoner."

"And I," said the prince, "Moses Falk, the polish Jew."

"I should rather have thought a Bohemian one," observed the host, with a bow such as few country innkeepers are accustomed to make."

Our readers will of course recollect that Prince Rupert was the son of the unfortunate King of Bohemia, by the daughter of James I.

"Gentlemen, are we all faithful to King Charles who are assembled here?"

"All! all!" was the general reply.

"Then I will explain the purport of my visit," continued the speaker. "I came to seek loyal and brave hearts, and have found them here. Our monarch, though condemned, has still one chance for safety. Fairfax and the Presbyterians are on their march to London. Scotland, repenting her late treachery, are rising in arms to rescue him. If we can but delay the fatal day, we may baffle the traitors yet."

"How delay it?" demanded Sir John Barlow.

"By an act of resolution," continued the prince. "The executioner of London, struck with horror at the sacrilegious thought of performing his accursed office on an anointed head, has fled from the metropolis. A substitute has, however, been found in the functionary of York, who is expected to arrive to-night."

"He shall never reach London living," observed the waggoner.

"Death to the villain!" was the general cry of the disguised Royalists. Rupert heard them with pleasure, and resumed his plans.

"My intention is not to take the wretch's life, for his blood would disgrace the swords of loyal gentlemen; but to secure his person and detain him prisoner till the fatal day is past."

"But where can we detain him?" demanded several.

"Never trouble your heads where," said the host; "only bring him here, and I'll promise to dispose of him. Do you think an

old soldier like myself so little skilled in war as not to have secured a retreat in case of danger? Bring the ruffian here, and I will answer for his safe keeping with more than my life—my honour."

The project was discussed, and instantly agreed to. Half a dozen of the youngest and most active of the Cavaliers agreed, at break of day, to meet the prince, well armed, at the commencement of the great north road, differently disguised.

"Come, gentlemen," exclaimed the prince, when everything was arranged, "one cup to the success of our enterprise before we part!"

The glasses on the table were filled to the brim.

"Here is the deliverance of King Charles!"

Scarcely had the toast been drained before a loud knocking at the outside door, accompanied by a volley of musketry through the windows, announced, not only that the house was surrounded, but the character of those assembled there was well known.

"Let us not die like dogs," said Rupert, "but strike one last blow for vengeance and King Charles!"

The excited Royalists drew their swords, and were about to unbar the door and rush out, when Sir John Barlow prevented them.

"There is safety," he whispered, "safety for all. Follow me."

The old soldier had long prepared himself for an emergency like the present. The heavy rafters of the cottage were laden with bundles of hay and straw, soaked in turpentine, pitch, and other combustible matters reaching to the roof. Taking a brand from the fire, he applied it, and in an instant the room was filled with flame and smoke. "Now then, follow me," he cried.

Opening the door leading to the cellar, he rapidly descended, followed by his guests, just as a second volley of musketry announced that the assailants were getting impatient for their prey.

"They fire steadily," observed the prince; "these are Cromwell's Ironsides."

"We shall baffle them, your highness, were they twenty times more numerous."

"Yes," added the earl, "to be smothered like rats in the cellar by the fire above."

"Patience, my lord, be patient!"

Raising a heavy stone, which apparently served as a covering to a well, Sir John pointed out to his companions certain notches in the shaft, by means of which they might descend, and set them the example by proceeding first. About half-way down they came to an iron door, which, by touching a spring, opened internally and disclosed a passage, something like the shaft of a mine, running in a parallel direction with the pavement above them. The lamp which their conductor carried gave them light sufficient to pursue

the track, which they did till they found themselves assembled in a square vault rudely arched over with brick and stone.

"At least," said the prince, "we are safe here."

"From all but starvation," observed the earl. "Old soldier," he added, "you have, I confess, constructed your fortress with marvellous skill, but you have forgotten one most important point."

"And what is that?"

"To provision it," added his friend.

"We shall not require it," said the old man, with a confident smile. "We are nearer our deliverance than you imagine, for there is——"

A loud explosion, which shook the massive vault to its foundation, and threw several of the fugitives upon the ground, cut short the observation of Sir John, whose horror-stricken companions distinctly heard the crumbling of the shaft by which they had descended, and the falling in of the passage.

"Lost! lost!" they exclaimed.

"Nay," said their conductor, "say saved! saved!"

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## CHAPTER XVII.

THE old knight who, to serve the cause of his royal master, had so long descended to play the humble host, as soon as the shock was over, conducted his companions to the extreme end of the vault, where a second passage continued its sinuous windings through the bowels of the earth, and terminated under a lime-kiln at the distance of about a quarter of a mile from the scene of the late explosion, the effect of which, although it had considerably shaken the damp, crumbling walls, had not caused them to fall in, except in the first one, which conducted to the well; had it, their fate would have been even more dreadful than their enemies anticipated, who returned to their master with the conviction that the Royalists had perished in the ruins of the humble lonely hostel.

"By my faith," exclaimed the earl, "but this nest of thine has as many windings as a warren. For what kind of vermin was this labyrinth made, and how came you acquainted with it?"

"I discovered it by mere accident some years since. The cottage stood upon the site of the Cistercian abbey founded by Henry VI., and demolished by his pious namesake. As for the labyrinth, as you are pleased to term it, it was doubtless fashioned by the monks of old."

"I thought," observed one of the party, "that it was some Papistical contrivance."

"Come," whispered Rupert, with a smile, "let us not abuse

them. Whatever their motive, it has, in the hour of danger, answered our purpose. We owe our lives to the architect, so we will e'en speak well of him, were he Satan himself, who perhaps, after all," he added, with a smile, "had more to do with it than the harmless monks."

"Satan!" repeated their guide, with a look of incredulity.

"Even he," resumed the prince. "In the castle of Heidelberg, where, before my unhappy father's accession to the crown of Bohemia, I resided, there are a hundred such—some winding through columns, others concealed in the solid masonry; and not a peasant in the broad lands of the palatinate but is ready to swear that the subterranean outlets, nay, castle and all, with the exception of the Ritter-saal, which was erected in honour of my mother, are the works of the prince of darkness, who is supposed to take a peculiar interest in all that concerns our house."

"I have heard my father speak of the place you name. He was present when your royal mother entered it first a bride."

"And lived to be driven from it a fugitive," added Rupert, dashing away a tear. "I can remember it as it were but yesterday. The noble river—my own glorious Rhine—was red with the flames reflected from the peasant's hut and many a knightly hold. The whole palatinate was in a blaze—enemies surrounded us on every side. I was but a child at the time, yet the horrors of that night live in my memory still."

By the time the subterranean travellers emerged from their dreary road, which terminated in the deserted lime-kiln, it was night—winter's night, with its gloom and desolation; the wind blew keenly and shrieked as it dashed through the trees, whose leafless branches opposed but a feeble barrier to its passage. The sudden change, from the close warm passage they had traversed to the bleak night air, chilled their blood, and caused the little party to draw their cloaks closely round them as they prepared to brave it.

"What are we to do for horses?" whispered one. "The Ironsides have doubtless taken ours."

Even the knight, their host, so fertile in expedients, was puzzled. The embarrassment was a serious one, for without horses it was impossible to carry out their enterprise of arresting the executioner on his way to London, and so delay the fate of the unhappy Charles.

"For four horses," exclaimed Rupert, with a look of desperation, "I would give at this moment ten years of my life!"

"And no very extravagant proffer either," observed the earl, "considering that without them we have none of us the chance of living ten days. The Puritanical rascals will make short work of us if once we fall into their hands. No hound has so keen a scent for blood as your true fanatic."

"Whose house is that?" suddenly demanded Rupert, pointing

to a building, half-manor, half-farm, which stood upon the skirt of the open ground, about half a mile from where they stood.

"That," said the knight, "is the residence of Lilly, the astrologer; as rank a malignant as Fairfax or Cromwell himself. Since the Parliament sent him to Oxford and Colchester to assure the army of the Roundheads' success, he hath done nothing but predict disasters to the Royal cause, and, unfortunately, his predictions have been almost invariably fulfilled."

"I wonder," said the earl, "if the fellow has predicted that his stables will be broken into and his horses carried off to-night?"

A general laugh announced that the proposition so indirectly made was understood, and after a few moments' brief consultation it was decided that the party should at once proceed to the house, and obtain what they required by peaceful means, if possible; but at all events to obtain them, for they felt that their own lives, as well as the hope of saving the king's, depended upon their success.

The Royalists, separating, made their way in different directions towards the mansion of the astrologer, which was situated on the brow of a gently rising hill, flanked by a dark wood of mingled pine and beech. There was something lonely and desolate in the appearance of the house; nothing around denoted that it was inhabited; all was still and silent; the only thing which indicated an occupant was a light which shed a sickly glare through the large bay window of the room over the Gothic porch.

"It does not seem that we shall find horses here," whispered the earl, as soon as the party were assembled under the walnut-tree which grew in front of the porch, and whose towering branches rose to the height of the roof of the mansion.

"Don't decide so hastily," replied the knight. "Master Lilly is better provided than you imagine. Fame speaks of chambers in that old house hung with tapestry from the looms of Flanders, and pictures from the pencil of Vandyke. We all know," he added, "the state in which he went to Colchester, when sent by the Parliament to encourage Fairfax."

"True," said Rupert, "and the luxurious charlatan is not the man to leave London for this secluded spot on foot, or to remain here without attendance as well as the means of returning. Search the offices, gentlemen; I will remain to keep watch; but let no attack be made till we have first compared our observations."

Drawing his cloak yet more tightly around him to protect himself from the bitter night-wind, which kept continually moaning and sighing like an unquiet spirit among the branches of the walnut-tree, and shrieking like a living thing amongst the gables and quaint old chimneys of the house, whose angular buttresses presented a stronger resistance, the speaker remained with his eyes fixed upon the light streaming through the window of the porch, while his companions began to search the offices and out-houses,

which stood at a short distance from the main building. Although a soldier and a man of the world, trained in camps, and tempered in the hard school of adversity, the prince was not exempt from the superstition and credulous belief of the time. Despite his judgment and philosophy, the wild tales of his infancy and the legends of the watch-fire and battle-field had made an impression on his mind, and his weakness believed where his reason rejected and denied.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, standing with his eyes still fixed upon the window, "misfortune and solitude have made me superstitious. I know the fellow is an impostor—that at the very moment he pretends to read into futurity for others, he is ignorant of the danger which awaits himself. And yet," he added, "I would risk something to see at this moment how he is occupied."

The words had no sooner passed his lips than the light within the chamber suddenly changed from the pale sickly yellow glare to a deep red, tinged here and there with a violet hue. It fell upon the leafless tree, so powerful were its rays, and rendered every branch, like the limbs of a skeleton, distinctly visible. The heart of the prince beat wildly, yet his resolution was unchanged, and his courage strong as ever.

"At any risk," he murmured, "I will see what passes in that unholy chamber. If the ministers of hell are really at work, I do not fear them; God and my good conscience will protect me. If they are merely mortal agents, I am not without friends to protect, or if I fall, avenge me."

With these words the speaker slowly approached the house, and began climbing the open stonework of the porch, which was so cut in devices and quaint ornaments that it afforded secure footing for a man of his light figure and active habits. By slow degrees—for he was obliged to proceed cautiously, as one false step might have alarmed the inmates—he contrived to reach the balcony which surrounded the window, and hung on by the ledge; a position which enabled him not only to see all that passed in the interior, but, when the inmates spoke loudly, to overhear their conversation.

In the interior of the apartment were two persons, one dressed in a plain black velvet gown, girdled round the waist by a silver chain, on which were enamelled the twelve signs of the Zodiac. His features were more marked by shrewdness than intellect, and there was an expression about the mouth which indicated the strength of the animal passions. He was seated in a chair, listening to his companion, a thick-set, burly-looking man, plainly dressed, who was impatiently pacing up and down the floor of the apartment. Upon a table covered with books, parchments, and strange-looking instruments and chemical apparatus, were a lamp and silver chafing-dish, the hot embers in which showed that it had been lately used. The first of the parties we have endeavoured to describe was Lilly,

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